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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 003407

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/05/2012  
TAGS: PREL PHUM PTER KPAL EG IS  
SUBJECT: "1,000 PLUS" HAJJ PILGRIMS ENTER EGYPT AT RAFAH  
DECEMBER 4

REF: A. CAIRO 3400

- 1B. CAIRO 3369
- 1C. CAIRO 3262
- 1D. CAIRO 3309

Classified By: DCM Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) An official at the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI) Liaison Agency with International Organizations (LAWIO) estimated that over 1,000 Hajj pilgrims crossed the Egypt-Gaza border at Rafah on December 4. Although some of pilgrims traveled from Rafah to the Nuweiba port to board ferries on December 4, the vast majority spent the night inside the Rafah terminal. The LAWIO official noted that the terminal is not equipped to have such a large number of overnight guests and described the situation as "a real mess." The Red Crescent and other local charitable organizations have been feeding the travelers.

12. (C) On December 5, approximately 800 of the pilgrims who had spent the night in the terminal were intending to travel by buses to the Nuweiba port, the official said. Although the official said an additional number may be going to Al Arish to board airplanes, emboffs flying over Al Arish airport on December 5 did not see either crowds or airplanes at that airport. The LAWIO official said that as of 1430 local on December 5, no pilgrims had crossed into Egypt at Rafah, and crowds on the Gaza side of Rafah were "very small." When asked how the GOE intends to handle the return of the pilgrims following the Hajj, the official said that this is still unclear.

13. (C) All local papers covered the crossing of pilgrims into Egypt at Rafah. Reports were predominantly factual, sourced to wire services (AP, AFP, Reuters). The overall tone ranged from neutral to positive on Egypt's role in opening the border to help pilgrims make the Hajj. Coverage in Islamonline.com, however, noted that Egypt's perceived "foot dragging" on opening the border had "touched raw nerves."

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